

COVER CROPS AND WILDLIFE

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Redwood Falls

Cover Crops

- Good for soil health, water quality, long term crop production, grazing, and potentially pollinators
- Useful to wildlife but not a silver bullet



Cereal Rye

One of the easiest to establish

Very cold hardy

Carries over to spring

Grazing potential

Wildlife Benefit

Green browse for deer, geese, hare

Limited fall cover for partridge, hare

Potential nesting trap for pheasants, partridge, grassland birds



Oilseed Radish

Can be aurally seeded

Fair cold tolerance

Rapid growth

Wildlife Benefits

Fair to good fall and winter food for deer and hare

Fair fall cover for partridge, hare

Little winter cover value

Potential pollinator value

Potential for songbird food if it has time to ripen



Turnips/Rape/ Kale

Brassicas – Cabbage
Family

Can be aurally seeded

Tolerate cold

Grazing potential

Wildlife Benefits

Excellent fall and winter
food for deer, hare

Fair to good fall and mild
winter cover for
partridge, hare



Mustard

Very fast growing

Can be aerially seeded

Potential pollinator

Benefit

Can reduce nematode problems

Can be weedy

Wildlife Benefit

Fair food value for deer, hare

Potentially good brood cover for pheasants, partridge if seeded early (following small grain, peas)

Fair fall cover for pheasants, hare, partridge



Oats

Establishes quickly

Cold Tolerant

Winterkills

Wildlife Benefit

Excellent green browse
for deer, hare, geese

Fair fall cover for
partridge, hare if seeded
early enough



Wheat

Establishes quickly

Not as cold tolerant as
oats or rye

Winter wheat does not
winter kill

Some potential for winter
wheat to be seeded as a
cash crop after early
maturing soybeans

Wildlife Benefits

Excellent green browse
for deer, hare, geese

Fair fall cover for hare,
partridge if seeded early
enough

Fair to good nesting cover
for pheasants, partridge,
waterfowl, hare, grassland
birds if grown for cash
crop



Buckwheat

Very fast growing
Potential pollinator value
Not cold tolerant
Good for drowned out sites
Will self sow

Wildlife Benefit

Deer love to eat the blossoms
Excellent for honeybees and native bees
Highly preferred food for pheasants, turkeys, partridge, waterfowl if allowed to mature seed
Little cover value after early fall



Sorghum/ Sudangrass

Very fast growth in hot weather

Not cold tolerant

Needs well drained soil

Good choice for drowned out sites after they have dried

Wildlife Benefit

Fair to good fall through winter cover for pheasant, deer, rabbit if allowed to stand over winter

If planted early enough can provide excellent food source for pheasant, songbirds, and rabbits



Millet

Several varieties with
varying moisture
tolerances

Not cold tolerant

Very fast to establish

Winterkills

Wildlife Benefits

Good to excellent food
value for pheasants,
partridge, songbirds,
waterfowl if seed
allowed to mature

Fair to good fall cover
for partridge, hare

Snow will flatten it



Clovers

Several varieties with varying cold and soil tolerances

Can be aerially seeded

Most will carry over winter

Add nitrogen

Wildlife Benefits

Excellent green browse for deer, hare, geese

May be some brood cover value for late pheasant and partridge broods

Fair fall cover for partridge, hare

Potential pollinator value



Red clover overseeded into corn

On the horizon?

Cash cropping into
“living mulches”

Has potential to add vast
amounts of nesting and
brood rearing cover for
grassland birds, hares

Research at Wisconsin,
Iowa, Georgia



Take Home

Cover crops achieve excellent results for soil health, water quality, and long term crop production

Cover crops are not a silver bullet for farm country wildlife, most habitat benefits are either redundant (food isn't limiting the population, i.e. deer) or short lived (ended by winter weather and/or tillage)

Still need perennial vegetation (grassland and wetlands) out on the landscape for wildlife

